

Fertility Awareness Method (FAM) / Natural Family Planning (NFP)

How can you learn about NFP or FAM?

Call your local health department, family planning agency, Planned Parenthood or Community Service Office (DSHS-CSO) for information and referrals. It is recommended that anyone interested in using this method take a course taught by a Certified Fertility Awareness Instructor.

Suggested reading:

Weschler, Toni, MPH. *Taking Charge of Your Fertility: The Definitive Guide to Natural Birth Control and Pregnancy Achievement*, HarperCollins, 2001.

What are Fertility Awareness Method and Natural Family Planning methods?

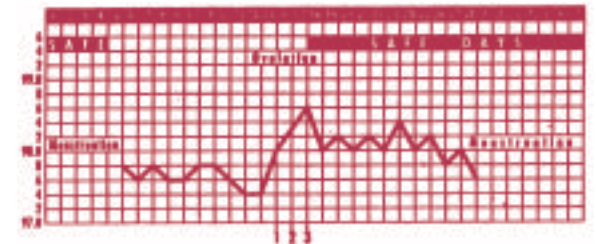
The Fertility Awareness Method (FAM) is a way of determining your fertility by observing three primary fertility signs: waking body temperature, cervical fluid, and cervical position. Using this method allows the use of barrier birth control methods (e.g., condoms) during the fertile period of the cycle.

The Natural Family Planning (NFP) method uses fertility awareness, but NFP users abstain from sexual intercourse during the fertile period of the cycle.

FAM and NFP are difficult to learn and require lots of practice. These methods are also called The Ovulation Method, The Billings Method or The Sympto-Thermal Method.

How do you use FAM or NFP?

FAM can be used to plan a pregnancy or prevent a pregnancy. As you become more familiar with the signs of ovulation and the pattern of your menstrual cycle, you can plan sexual activity to avoid or plan a pregnancy.



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A menstrual cycle is counted from the first day of bleeding in one month to the first day of bleeding the next month (usually 23-35 days). You must check and write down the specific signs of fertility every day of your menstrual cycle to learn when you are fertile.

Basal Body Temperature (BBT):

BBT is your body temperature at rest. You take your temperature each morning before you get out of bed. Your BBT rises within 12 hours of your monthly ovulation. After your temperature has been higher for 3 or more days you may assume your fertility period has ended for that cycle.

Cervical fluid:

Your cervical fluid (mucus or vaginal discharge) changes throughout each menstrual cycle. Right after your menstrual period you may have no fluid or dry days. As ovulation approaches, the fluid becomes sticky, creamy, and stretchy (like egg white). These fluid changes are related to fertility and are very important to learn to use this method effectively.

Cervical position:

Another change during your menstrual cycle is the cervical position. Your cervix can be low, firm, closed and nonwet when you are not fertile. It will be high, soft, open and wet when you are fertile. These signs may be difficult to check unless you have a health provider give you some specific instructions and counseling.

Effectiveness rates:

The effectiveness of FAM/NFP varies. This method can be highly effective if the instructions are followed carefully for each and every cycle.

Some benefits of FAM and NFP:

This method has no health risks or side effects. It can increase your awareness and understanding of your body. It can be used as birth control, and then provide very helpful information when a pregnancy is being planned. Couples may develop greater communication, cooperation and responsibility using this method. It is an acceptable method for some women and couples with religious concerns about other birth control.

Potential side effects or disadvantages:

Learning this method takes time and practice. Using this method consistently takes commitment, calculation, planning and cooperation between a woman and her partner.

FAM/NFP only gives you protection against HIV (AIDS) or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as chlamydia, herpes, genital warts, gonorrhea, hepatitis B and syphilis when being abstinent.

Potential risks:

No health risks.